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Abstract

Keywords:
school success; life skills; inclusive politics; multicultural schools.

A multicultural school is meant to promote inclusive politics and equitable learning opportunities and that in the framework of the winding quest for high educational outcomes for each and every student, regardless of ethnicity and socio-economic backgrounds. School success is not merely the salient knowledge span, it encompasses a set of life skills, parental support, brain power and a myriad of attitudes meant to allow the school leaver not only to avoid depletion, but also to achieve high performance goals and, what's more, to ensure fair treatment to all. Equipped with fortitude, resilience and a team spirit, the school leaver finds thus attainment by taking different educational pathways, from the theoretical to the vocational one. School success is ultimately about finding fulfilment, about leading a quality life and feeling integrated wherever one may be. Taking on challenges in exchanges among the different ethnic groups, making practical use of soft sills to stay connected and agile in such a community, grappling with the link between the school curriculum and the practicalities of the world around, all these might be the tipping point to be analyzed and addressed by the present article. Yet, in a multicultural learning environment attachment to one's cultural values with its spillover implications is far from enough, it must align with keeping all lines of communication open for cultural exchange, even to the point where the exchanges become goals and social and emotional learning go hand in hand with academic achievement.

Zusammenfasung

Schlüsselworte:
Schulerfolg; Lebenskompetenzen; inklusive Politik; multikulturelle Schulen.

Eine multikulturelle Schule soll integrative Politik und gleichberechtigte Lernmöglichkeiten fördern und dies im Rahmen des mühsamen Strebens nach hohen Bildungsergebnissen für jeden einzelnen Schüler, unabhängig von ethnischer Zugehörigkeit und sozioökonomischem Hintergrund. Schulerfolg ist nicht nur die herausragende Wissensspanne, er umfasst eine Reihe von Lebenskompetenzen, elterlicher Unterstützung, Gehirnleistung und eine Vielzahl von Einstellungen, die es dem Schulabgänger nicht nur ermöglichen sollen, Erschöpfung zu vermeiden, sondern auch hohe Leistungsziele zu erreichen und, was ist mehr noch, um eine faire Behandlung aller zu gewährleisten. Ausgestattet mit Standhaftigkeit, Belastbarkeit und Teamgeist findet der Schulabgänger seinen Erfolg, indem er verschiedene Bildungswege beschreitet, von der theoretischen bis zur beruflichen Bildung. Beim Schulerfolg geht es letztlich darum, Erfüllung zu finden, ein qualitativ hochwertiges Leben zu führen und sich integriert zu fühlen, wo auch immer man ist. Herausforderungen im Austausch zwischen den verschiedenen ethnischen Gruppen anzunehmen, Soft Sills praktisch zu nutzen, um in einer solchen Gemeinschaft verbunden und agil zu bleiben, sich mit der Verbindung zwischen dem Schullehrplan und den praktischen Gegebenheiten der Welt auseinanderzusetzen – all dies könnte der Wendepunkt sein die im vorliegenden Artikel analysiert und behandelt werden sollen. Doch in einer multikulturellen Lernumgebung reicht die Verbundenheit mit den eigenen kulturellen Werten mit ihren Spillover-Implikationen bei weitem nicht aus. Sie muss darauf ausgerichtet sein, alle Kommunikationswege für den kulturellen Austausch offen zu halten, sogar bis zu dem Punkt, an dem der Austausch zu Zielen wird und soziales und emotionales Lernen aufhört Hand in Hand mit akademischen Leistungen.

1. Introduction

School success within the framework of multicultural schools encompasses multiple meanings, sets of pathways generally not visible in monocultural schools. Equity and inclusiveness are priority terms here, as well as accessibility and a sense of belonging to a school community that ensures a fair treatment to all. Moreover, in order to understand the ingredients to school children's succeeding, the context of a multicultural school must be further analyzed, alongside the conceptual facets of success in school. In a climate „orchestrated by the pressures of globalization" (Costin & Roman, 2020, p. 2), the case

study and the research applied in a high school in the Danube Gorge does not analyze school success in multicultural learning environment as a byproduct of a globalized world, neither that of a localized one, but as a culturally diverse, inclusive medium as a result of a rich historical multiethnic heritage.

1.1. A conceptual analysis of school success

Seen as "academic excellence" by Garbarino (2008) in early literature, where school represented „a setting primarily dedicated to cognitive development and the acquisition of knowledge and intellectual skills" (p. 157), the view is shared by the guide teacherpowered.org, which, similarly, supports the idea that school success is determined by standardised tests. In an analogous way, Kalet et al. (2006, p. 921) defines school success as "a consistent awareness of and loyalty to one's own goals and priorities". There are various traditional spheres of defining academic excellence, but modern perspectives and pragmatic scholars shift the emphasis from acquisition to competence, also in view of the new educations. As previously mentioned, once literature was adamant in defining academic success only by the "acquisition of desired knowledge" (York et al., 2015, p. 5) and school success only meant cognitive development, standard tests and the adage that „knowledge is power". New frameworks in defining school success since the onset of the multiple intelligences theory (Gardner, 1993), range from that of the mindset as a key factor in determining achievement (Dweck, 2017), the boosting of the emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2018), the synthesis of life skills (Durlak, 2011), alongside the new European Commission Council Recommendations of November 2022 on "Pathways to School Success" and the tireless quest for "lifelong learning" as defined by the European proposals of May 2022. All these concepts play a pivotal role in understanding school success and bring the concept into a new educational reality. On top of all these, the post-pandemic reality is not necessarily about online learning, but it is a lot more about blended learning, about sharing knowledge and good practices, "with a view to enabling all to succeed" as the European Toolkit for Schools puts it.

In synthesis, school success may best be defined by the 15th recommendation of the European Commission Council Recommendations of November 2022 on "Pathways to School Success", namely as "a balanced set of balanced cognitive, social and emotional competences to achieve positive outcomes in school and in life" since achievement in school without bearing in mind the outcomes and the insertion in the job market is hardly sustainable. This brings the research a step further, specifically to the second issues in debate, in the sense that the educational environment should definitely be an inclusive and supportive one and the context in which students evolve has a key role in the process.

1.2. Multiculturalism, historical heritage and ethnic diversity in the Danube Gorge schools

To take a close look at what defines a multicultural school one ought to take an even closer look at the local, national or regional socio-economic and cultural background. The present study is part of the doctoral thesis that focuses on a particular area of Romania known as the Danube Gorge, a place where the „cultural harmonious confrontation" (Constantin & Badea, 2014) between the ethnic groups that have settled here in the course of the centuries-long waves of European migrations is a means of preserving, yet even still forging multicultural communities. The waves of colonization meant Hungarian, Czech, Bulgarian, German, Croatian and Serbian populations ending up living together in the Banat region, the Danube Gorge included, in strong intercultural relations. Historian Cerović explains that by the sixth century "The Lower Danube territories were inhabited by a population structure made up by Dacians and Slavs" (Cerović, 2005, p. 4), namely Romanians and Serbians as we know then today, alongside other Slavic populations. And Cerović referring to the situation of the same Slavic populations explains that the extended Banat region, not merely the Danube Gorge, has known a specific "decline in population of the Serbians and other ethnic groups", both in the „absolute and the relative aspect" (Cerović, 2005, p. 177). Moreover, the data collected by the National Institute of Statistics (INS) in the 2021 census, which will see its final results published at the end of June 2023 has brought to the surface a further gap, making the "decline" mentioned by Cerović even stronger. And partial results emphasize the fact that since there still are 3408 Serbians in Caraș-Severin, only 45% of them speak Serbian, whereas with reference to the Czech population, out of the 909 Czechs only 40% of them are Czech speakers. As the decline in the ethnic population is obvious, what Bulzan described as acculturation (Bulzan, 2007) represents the very essence of a multicultural region in this part of Romania: the merging of Romanian, Serbian, Czech, Hungarian and other cultures as a result of the prolonged cohabitation over the course of history.

By understanding the structure of the population, one comes to the realization that the long-standing state of cohabitation of all these ethnic minorities alongside Romanians has shaped one generation after the other with a clear impact on schools and the educational approaches. From monoethnic rural mountaintop communities, as with the case of Czech village schools or low Danube front Serbian or Romanian schools, students 'descend' or 'ascend' to the only high school in the Danube Gorge and enter a multicultural school community.

2. Theoretical foundation

In a conceptual analysis on what ought to be identified as a multicultural school in the previous edition of the European Proceedings of Educational Sciences (David-Izvernar & Roman) the following educational design arose: there is a definite route from the mere structure of the school population to the culturally competent whole-school approach. Thus, the first step is the cultural awareness which leads to cultural understanding and ultimately to a culturally competent school community.

Step 1: cultural awareness

Step 2: cultural understanding

Step 3: a culturally competent school

The article further discusses extended school community interactions, appreciation of the other ethnic community, from school policy makers to students and their families, curricular adaptations to "address culturally sensitive issues" and multilingualism as essential concepts in identifying a school of the multicultural type. This conceptual analysis provides thus a framework and lays the theoretical foundation for the present research.

3. Research methodology

Research conducted in the biggest high school in Caraș-Severin, located in the Danube Gorge, with sudents of different ethnic groups, as mentioned in chapter two, which has both vocational and theoretical classes, points out to those specific elements of a multicultural school and to the way in which those elements can trigger positive educational outcomes. What is more, alongside the 4-years highschoolers' education the school encompasses 3-year vocational classes, the trade school in the technological domains: Tourism and Mechanics.

Consequently, a Likert scale from 1-5 questionnaire was administered to all school students graded nine to eleven, whereby the 185 respondents

identify themselves by their ethnic origin in the cultural dimension of the school (tables 1-3). Although the number of students who identify themselves with either parent as part of an ethnic group is lower: for example, 18/15 Serbian parents, yet only 7 students see themselves as being Serbians, the intercultural aspect is there, the exchanges within the nuclear family are still strong and enrich the school community.

Table 1. The multicultural dimension of the school

Item	Ethnicity	Number of students who answered
Romanian		167
Serbian		7
Czech		5
Hungarian		2
Roma		2
Other		2

Table 2. The multicultural dimension of the school -father's ethnicity

Item	Ethnicity	Number of students who answered
Romanian		157
Serbian		18
Czech		3
Hungarian		4
Roma		2
Other		1

Table 3. The multicultural dimension of the school-mother's ethnicity

Item	Ethnicity	Number of students who answered
Romanian		160
Serbian		15
Czech		7
Hungarian		2
Other		1

A key feature by which multicultural schools set out is the intercultural exchange and this theme is reflected in the survey results in table 4, which represents a response to the statement: „This school offers opportunities for intercultural educational activities, as well as for extracurricular intercultural activities", whereby such opportunities are viewed as an active part of this school: out of the 185 students, 151 know that they can take advantage of this chance.

Table 4. Multicultural educational and extracurricular activities and projects

Questionnaire	Number of students who answered
Strongly disagree	4
Disagree	8
Neutral	22
Agree	90
Strongly agree	61

Another essential aspect is multilingualism as a mark of a multicultural environment. Figures from table 5 point out to the fact that students are aware of the great opportunity they have to study foreign languages. Beyond the modern languages that all European schools offer courses in, English, French (and others) the study of mother tongues is essential in a multicultural school, in this case 95% of the students are aware of the fact that they can learn Serbian, Czech and German as mother tongue or just as another foreign language.

Table 5. The study of mother tongues: Serbian, Czech, German

Questionnaire	Number of students who answered
Strongly disagree	0
Disagree	2
Neutral	7
Agree	62
Strongly agree	114

Regarding the effect of a multicultural school on the social understanding towards other ethnic groups, as students arrive and start studying in a multicultural high school the degree of social understanding towards other ethnic communities is higher than in primary and secondary schools, as seen in table 6. Here figures show that 71% of the respondents to the matter in discussion: „Since entering this school, my level of social understanding towards other ethnic groups is higher", have declared that they (strongly) agree to the statement.

Table 6. The effect on the social understanding of the student

Questionnaire	Number of students who answered
Strongly disagree	4
Disagree	8
Neutral	40
Agree	88
Strongly agree	44

4. Conclusions

Seen in the terms defined in the first chapter, school success is universally accepted by its well-defines scopes. Nonetheless, when a multicultural educational community adds a new dimension to school success, it is seen in a broader sense, namely in the sense that such a community benefits from a culturally aware learning environment and an inclusive approach to enhance collaborative learning. Nonetheless, in the quest for a happy and successful school medium, limitations and risks may arise, such as not speaking the Romanian language fluently or speaking it with an accent, a tendency to isolate oneself within the group of friends of similar ethnic descend, feeling isolated or discriminated. Yet, systematic dialogue and entailment from decision makers alongside extracurricular activities, language classes and mixed groups project-learning will diminish such risks of disadvantage or discrimination and will boost the inclusive educational environment, which, in turn, will lead to students being happier, better accomplished and better equipped for life.

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